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THE BOOK OF THE MONTH

SIR OLIVER LODGE TAKES THE STAND¹

BY LAWRENCE GILMAN

THE most impressive feature of Sir Oliver Lodge's new attempt at a demonstration of the validity of post-mortem communication is the intellectual attitude of Sir Oliver himself toward the matter. One reads, say, the communication supposed to have been received through a medium from Sir Oliver's son Raymond half a year after he was killed in the trenches near Ypres: one reads, perhaps, with the reaction conventionally appropriate to the situation, the passage in which the "control" is conveying Raymond's description of the way the "spirit spheres" are built round the earth plane, and "seem to revolve with it": "Only, naturally, the first sphere isn't revolving at such a rate as the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh spheres. Greater circumference makes it seem to revolve more rapidly. That seems to have an actual effect on the atmospheric conditions prevailing in any one of the spheres . . . that's why he felt a bit careful when he was on a higher sphere; in hanging on to the ground." At this point you come upon an interjected note by Sir Oliver which will variously affect the readers of *Raymond*. "A good deal of this," remarks Sir Oliver, "struck me as nonsense; as if Feda [the 'control'] had picked it up from some sitter. But I went on recording what was said."

The matter-of-fact air of that, the attitude of candor and detachment, is as characteristic of Sir Oliver's presentation as it will be reassuring and impressive to those readers who are neither flippanant nor intolerant nor bourbonistic.

¹ *Raymond, or Life and Death. With Examples of the Evidence for Survival of Memory and Affection After Death*, by Sir Oliver J. Lodge. New York: George H. Doran Company, 1917.

For the vacuous and indolent sensationalist, for those whose attitude toward this subject is merely one of bigotry and obscurantism, this trait will be disconcerting: for there is little sport to be derived from ridiculing the exhibit of an investigator who has been so unaccommodating as to checkmate you by ridiculing it himself. This calmly objective attitude Sir Oliver has maintained with a continuity which should make friends by the hundred for his "evidence" (our quotation-marks are intended to indicate caution rather than derogation). Anyone less intellectually honorable in his relation to the matter than Sir Oliver would have suppressed certain pages whose exhibition is as creditable to his candor as it is unmistakable in its declaration of a serene indifference to the braying of the herd at his expense. There is no more heartening aspect of this singularly touching book than its author's scrupulously impersonal attitude toward implications of the utmost personal concern to himself.

It needed courage and an exquisite order of faith to publish Chapter XVI of *Raymond*; for Sir Oliver must have known that these pages, necessarily indisposing to gravity of reception, would certainly be the ones that the inevitable buffoon would isolate and distort and gloat over; and he must have known quite as well that little attention would be paid, in the joyous excitement of the carnival, to Sir Oliver's own characterization of this type of communication as "very non-evidential and perhaps ludicrous." So he calmly gives us the opportunity, if we choose to take it, of having our fling of merry-making over the medium's report of information from the dead Raymond concerning his status on "the Other Side," and such details of his condition as that he has acquired a new tooth; that an acquaintance who had lost "a limb" when he first "entered the astral" had "got a new one"; that when any one has been blown to pieces in battle it takes some time "for the spirit body to complete itself"; that in the case of bodies burnt by accident, "if they know about it on this [the 'Other'] side, they detach the spirit first—what we call a spirit-doctor comes round and helps"; that even cigars are provided for the tobacco-loving dead: "it's not the same as on the earth plane, but they were able to manufacture what looked like a cigar"—not out of solid matter, but "out of essences, and ethers, and gases"; that these consumers of celestial Havanas also

call for whisky sodas—"don't think I'm stretching it when I tell you that they can manufacture even that." One knows what the general response must be to matter of that sort; yet Sir Oliver presents it without a qualm, merely observing that this talk, "which is at least humorous," has not been suppressed—as its kind usually is in reports of sittings—because he believed that "the evidence, such as it is, should be presented as a whole." He frankly confesses that he thinks the "control" may have picked up a good deal of this material from people who have read some of the cruder type of occult speculations; yet he believes, with Bergson, that, taken *en masse*, such "travelers' tales" should not be ignored, because of the possibility that they may ultimately, if properly studied, yield indications of value. He felt that, inasmuch as the other utterances of the control were often evidential, he had no right to pick and choose—"especially," he remarks, "as I know nothing about it, one way or the other." So, with an intrepidity for which even the most irreverent must salute him, he has compiled page after page of similar deliverances.

The communications relative to his son which Sir Oliver has seen fit to publish fill one hundred and sixty-odd pages of this extraordinary book, beginning several weeks before Raymond's death (in the form of a warning, referring cryptically to a passage in Horace, conjecturally sent by F. W. H. Myers) and continuing for nine months thereafter. Raymond Lodge, Sir Oliver's youngest son, a student of mechanical and electrical engineering, in his twenty-seventh year, was killed in Flanders September, 14th, 1915, after serving in the 2nd South Lancashire Regiment for six months. He seems to have been an alert, attractive, high-spirited youth, with a robust sense of fact. He "read widely," says his brother in an introductory memoir, and "liked good literature of an intellectual and witty but not highly imaginative type—at least I do not know that he read Shelley or much of William Morris." He was fond of Fielding, Pope, Jane Austen, Dickens, Reade, Charles Lamb. His letters display the elaborate casualness and insouciance that is the traditional attitude of the Englishman under fire—in the trenches he is "enjoying himself very much": if it wasn't for "the unpleasant sights one is liable to see," he writes, "war would be a most interesting and pleasant affair." Like the rest of Sir Oliver's family, he took no serious in-

terest in the problems of occult phenomena. He was, apparently, as little of a "sensitive" as the average young Englishman of his class and type. He had a passion for contriving acrostics; he was agreeably contemptuous of pompously conventional phrases like "the thick of the fighting"—he preferred to speak of "a hell of a shelling with shrapnel"; he was cool and able in danger, cheerful, industrious; and, says a brother officer, "a charming fellow."

The communications began to come to Sir Oliver and various members of his family almost immediately after Raymond's death, through several mediums and "controls." Their importance consists in the remarkable degree to which they seem to have satisfied Sir Oliver's exacting standards of evidential value. In substance they range from occasional examples of the triviality that is characteristic of such transpirations (by no means so mystifying and anomalous as it is usual to assume), to passages conspicuous for sobriety and feeling. Their prevailing tone is strikingly congruous with the qualities of personality and perception which one has erected into a psychic portrait of the dead lieutenant—they are for the most part the sort of communications one would have expected from him.

Only a fool or a fanatic would venture to comment dogmatically upon any phase of this impressive and (as we have already called it) most touching document of Sir Oliver Lodge's; and only a defective would titter in the presence of these stupendous issues. There is abundant incitement to ridicule in certain of Sir Oliver's more disaffecting exhibits, if, as he gravely observes, "any hostile critic thinks ridicule appropriate." That the casual reader should be persuaded of the validity of the evidence adduced is not important. That Sir Oliver himself has been persuaded is of extraordinary interest and significance. For none save the stupidly antagonistic can fail to perceive and respect the rigorously critical and challenging attitude of the recorder of these experiences toward their every aspect, and his freedom from emotional compromises. No sentimentalist traffics in Sir Oliver's soul. He is revealed throughout as unflaggingly skeptical, fearing every possibility of too sanguine acceptance. One of the most impressive demonstrations in the series he characterizes grudgingly as "a rather exceptionally good piece of evidence." Other sittings are "not especially evidential"; and "unverifiable" occurs

on page after page of the book. These communications from his son are, he says, "in many respects of an ordinary type." He has hoped that, in this time of unnatural and premature bereavement, their publication may give comfort to those who seek so passionately to know if "communication across the gulf is possible." But even without their tragic contemporary pertinence, the critical and scrupulous manner of their consideration makes this book a consequential offering; and you come to Sir Oliver's summarizing statement of what he calls "the case for survival" with a mind disposed to respect his conclusions.

It is no news to the world that Sir Oliver is convinced not only of the persistence of personality, but that he believes its continued existence to be more intertwined with the life of every day than has been generally imagined: that there is no real breach of continuity between the dead and the living; and that methods of intercommunication across what has seemed to be a gulf "can be set going in response to the urgent demand of affection." As to Raymond and his communications, Sir Oliver says that he considers his son has proved his personal survival and identity. The main thread which, he believes, links all the facts together in the present case is the hypothesis not only of continued or personal existence in the abstract, but a definite interlocking or inter-communication between two grades of existence—"the two in which we are most immediately interested and about which we can ascertain most: that of the present and that of the immediate future for each individual; together with the added probabilities that the actual grades of existence are far more than two, and that the forthcoming transition . . . is only one of many of which we shall, in some barely imaginable way, become aware."

He sees life as continuous and identical, without division or separateness. The change called death brings a change of circumstances to the individual, but only in the sense that he is now aware of a different group of facts: the change of surroundings is a subjective one. There is, he says, no "other" world; the universe is one. "We exist in it continuously all the time; sometimes conscious in one way, sometimes in another; sometimes aware of a group of facts on one side of a partition, sometimes aware of another group on the other side."

He is positive in his desire to make it clear to us that the

hypothesis of continued existence in another set of conditions, and of possible communication across a border, is not a gratuitous one made for the sake of comfort and consolation, or because of a dislike of the idea of extinction: "it is a hypothesis which has been gradually forced upon the author—as upon many other persons—by the stringent coercion of definite experience." His affirmation is of superb assurance: "I am," he asserts, "as convinced of continued existence, on the other side of death, as I am of existence here. It may be said, You cannot be as sure as you are of sensory experience. I say I can. A physicist is never limited to direct sensory impressions—he has to deal with a multitude of conceptions and things for which he has no physical organ . . . the theories of electricity, of magnetism, of chemical affinity, of cohesion, aye, and his apprehension of the Ether itself. . . . Yet these regions of knowledge are as clear and vivid to him as any of those encountered in every-day occupations."

It is one of his final meditations that "death" is not a word to dread, any more than "birth" is: "We change our state at birth, and come into the world of air and sense and myriad existence; we change our state at death and enter a region of—what? Of Ether, I think, and still more myriad existence . . . a region in which beauty and knowledge are as vivid as they are here: a region in which progress is possible, and in which 'admiration, hope, and love' are even more real and dominant."

These are immemorial and familiar thoughts, simply declared. Perhaps no one today could hope to imbue them with more of the dignity and earnestness they have here unless he were either a great dreamer or, like Sir Oliver, one who (in his own fine phrase) has never, through arrogance and dogmatism, "profaned the modesty of science." And when Sir Oliver asserts the essential unreality of death, he speaks, as well, in the voice of those who have dreamed greatly.

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